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SUBJECT: OPPOSITON MAYOR GUNNED DOWN BY UNKNOWN KILLERS

Classified By: Political Counselor Robin D. Meyer
for Reason 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (SBU) On September 12, opposition Mayor Lluvane Alvarez was shot dead in front of his house in Coloncito, a ranching town in northern Tachira state. Mayor Alvarez was a member of COPEI, Venezuela's Christian Democratic party and a strong supporter of Tachira's COPEI Governor Cesar Perez Vivas. According to witnesses, three men in a blue sedan fired on Alvarez as he exited his pickup truck following a tour of several public works projects and the local police station. Leomagno Flores of the Tachira Governor's Office called on the Prosecutor and the Criminal, Scientific and Penal Investigative Corps (CICPC) to conduct a speedy and thorough investigation.

12. (SBU) According to prior Venezuelan election practice, a special election would have been held within 30 days of an unexpected vacancy. However, the new law on electoral procedures gives wide discretion to the National Electoral Council on procedural matters, so it remains unclear when an election may be called.

13. (C) According to San Cristobal Police Chief Angel Perdomo, there are two theories regarding Alvarez's murder. Since both the FARC and ELN operate in strength in that part of Venezuela, Alvarez could have run afoul of either of those groups. (Note: The President of the Tachira Cattlemen's Association told PolOff that ranchers are regular targets of FARC kidnapping or protection rackets. End Note.) The second theory, and by Perdomo's own admission less likely, was that a political rival ordered the murder to force a special election. Chavistas in Tachira place the blame on Colombian right-wing paramilitaries.
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